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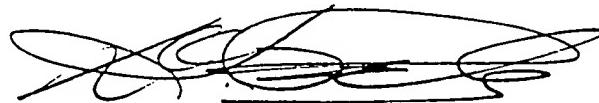
June 6, 1988

**MEMORANDUM TO:** Distribution  
**SUBJECT:** Qualitative Report on Tester Feedback

Attached is the written report on the qualitative portion of the Acceptance Study recently completed with panel and other testers. This report only reflects the qualitative feedback from 35 panel testers whose exposure to the PRODIGY Service began with software level 6.0 and April content.

Additional copies of this report may be obtained from Diane Montagnoli on X 8732.

Additional complete oral presentations on the results from this study, quantitative and qualitative can be arranged if requested.

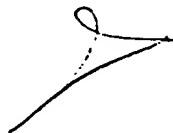
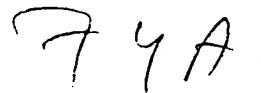
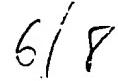
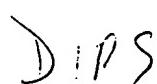


D. L. Polenz



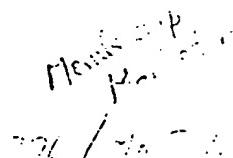
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Memorandum  
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QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS:  
PANEL TESTING  
OF THE 6.0 VERSION  
WITH APRIL 1988 CONTENT:  
PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup>, INTERACTIVE  
PERSONAL SERVICE

PREPARED FOR:  
TRINTEX  
WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK

PREPARED BY:

**Elrick and Lavidge, inc.**  
AN EQUIFAX COMPANY

1990 Lakeside Parkway, Third Floor, Tucker, Georgia 30084

MAY 1988

04-4790  
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## INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

As part of its continued development of PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup>, an interactive personal service, TRINTEX commissioned Elrick and Lavidge, Inc. to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research among various TRINTEX panel members who were on-line with the 6.0 version of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service with the April content. Previous qualitative research was conducted in December 1987 and February and March 1988 with users of the 5.X version of the service with earlier levels of content. With regard to the present study, the quantitative portion was conducted among members of several different TRINTEX panels who had had access to various versions of the service including the 5.X version while the qualitative segment was conducted among panel testers exposed only to the 6.0 version. The primary objectives of this qualitative phase of research were to:

- Ascertain users' general impressions of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service after their experience with the service on-line in their homes.
- Evaluate users' perceptions of the service in terms of: installation/enrollment procedures, instructional materials and Membership Services, mechanics, and content.
- Explore users' attitudes regarding the future direction of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service and their propensity to subscribe to the service in the future.
- Compare the reactions of users exposed only to the 6.0 version of the service to the reactions of users exposed to the 5.X version.

The findings presented in this report deal only with the qualitative phase of this research; therefore, these findings are not statistically reliable. Instead they should be viewed as suggestive and reflective of possible trends in the targeted population. To reiterate, for purposes of this report, respondents referred to as 6.0 users are panel testers who were only exposed to the 6.0 version with the April content while those referred to as 5.X users are panel testers who were exposed only to the 5.X version with earlier content.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature and the objectives of this research, focus groups were chosen as the optimal research vehicle for gathering the desired information. Focus groups foster an atmosphere which encourages respondent interaction as well as moderator-respondent dialogue. This group discussion atmosphere facilitates open and free exchange of ideas and opinions.

A total of five focus groups were conducted. A total of thirty-five respondents participated, eight of whom were female. The following outlines the schedule by which these groups were conducted:

<u>City</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Groups</u>
San Francisco	April 25	1
	April 26	1
Atlanta .	April 27	2
	April 28	<u>1</u>
		5

Respondents were qualified as being panel testers who had explored only the 6.0 version of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service with the April content for at least a few hours during the two weeks prior to the focus group discussions.

It should be noted that the majority of these testers were on-line with the service using a 1200 baud modem and saw the service in monochrome. Although many of the respondents owned color monitors, they were unable to view the service in color as they did not have EGA cards.

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and was both audio and video recorded. A copy of the screening questionnaire and the moderator's guide used in this study as well as the Acceptance Survey distributed to respondents are appended to this report.



## KEY FINDINGS

- The PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service is considered "user friendly" - easy to install, to enroll in and to use.
- Due to the level of information it provides and its mechanics, the service is viewed as being targeted toward the less experienced computer user.
- Depth and speed remain major issues. The depth of information is considered inadequate and the style of its presentation "childish" and "unsophisticated." Response time continues to be too slow to maintain users' interest and enthusiasm.
- General graphics are considered time-consuming and wasteful of space within the informational areas of the service; however, product illustrations are perceived as vital in the shopping area.
- Users want increased transactional and interactive capabilities made available to them as well as the addition of local information and transactional capabilities with local vendors.
- Users find the shopping information interesting but want incentives to entice them to shop through the service.
- Some participants find the service to be relaxing and entertaining.
- The majority of respondents would not subscribe to the service in its current form.
- The service is perceived to have unlimited potential if both the depth and breadth of the content/capabilities are further developed.



## DETAILED FINDINGS

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF 6.0 VERSION USERS

Initial thoughts about and reactions to the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service were mixed. On the positive side, some users mentioned they were impressed with the up-to-dateness of the sports and stock information. Other users liked the MAILBOX capability; still others remarked positively about how responsive the Experts were. The variety of service offerings was well liked, yet users would like the variety expanded with more interactive and utilitarian features.

The negative responses were most likely a result of the service not meeting the expectations of the users. Most users anticipated that the service was going to offer more indepth information than it did; others felt the service would provide more variety in terms of tonality of the substance and interactive capabilities; still others expected the service to be strictly informational, providing both general news and encyclopedic information. With regard to these expectations, users were disappointed; they felt that the service offered "surface" information rather than substantial content.

Aside from depth, speed was an issue when discussing first impressions of the service. Users were frustrated by the slowness of response and felt that the graphics not only impeded the speed of the service but also interfered with transmission/reception of substantial content. Once interested in the leader ads, users became frustrated when they were unable to return to their original place after exploring the indepth commercial client presentation and felt that the leader ads were often distracting.

While many users had somewhat negative first impressions of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service, their overriding feelings regarding the service seemed to be promising. These users voiced a lot of confidence in the potential of the service and had many suggestions as to how the service could be enhanced and molded into a very useful and entertaining tool.



## MECHANICS

### • Installation/Enrollment Process

While a few respondents recounted tales of having problems starting up on the service, the majority of testers said the process was easy to accomplish. Interestingly, the few who complained of encountering problems were those who had more sophisticated equipment and seemed to consider themselves relatively computer literate.

While considered "easy", the sign-on process was thought to be "laborious". A few of the users mentioned they would like the process simplified by not having to enter their I.D. number every time they log in. Instead, they want only to enter their password to gain immediate access to the service. Unlike respondents in previous research, the issue of security was apparently not of great concern to these users with regard to the sign-on/access process.

The streamlining of the sign-on process was not the only issue brought up. Another area which respondents mentioned as requiring some simplification was access to MAILBOX. Rather than having to use the JUMP key to get into MAILBOX, respondents want to have instant access from the "Highlights" screen since this is where they are notified that they have mail waiting.

### • Membership Services

Although the service was perceived as being easy to install, to enroll in and to use, several respondents had contact with Membership Services for one reason or another. Those who had contact with representatives came away with the perception that the personnel in Membership Services were "friendly," "helpful" and "polite," but not necessarily "knowledgeable." Oftentimes users solved their own problems, and some complained that Membership Services was slow to follow up on their particular problem.



- User Guide

Many respondents stated that, in general, they turn to instructions only as a "last resort"; therefore, the User Guide was used infrequently, if at all, during installation.

Those who did refer to the User Guide at some point stated the "QUICKCHART" page was most helpful as it outlined the salient features of the mechanics of the service. People seem far more inclined to turn to a quick reference which will inform them with a cursory glance rather than to refer to a formal instructional manual.

With respect to the materials created to facilitate use of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service, the templates provided to panel members were not necessarily useful as these templates often did not fit the keyboards of various makes of computer equipment. Even when they did fit, some users stated they did not place them on their keyboards but merely placed them beside the board where they were referred to when necessary.

- Navigation/Command Structure

Respondents had different levels of comfort with regard to the various means available to maneuver through the service. While some people set up their own Personal PATH, others used the command bar to navigate, still others used the function keys. The vast majority of users were unaware of the ZIP option, yet seemed very interested in having this capability when it was discussed in the focus groups. Users want to be made aware of these "tricks" which simplify and quicken the process of maneuvering through the service. Apparently, the "QUICKCHART" does not address these auxiliary command capabilities sufficiently for people to understand their function and to use them.

As mentioned previously, users would like some of the mechanics of the service simplified. They strive for the most expedient way to obtain the information they desire. The function keys are considered very useful as they eliminate the multiple key strokes required when using the command bar; however, the actual purpose of the function keys is apparently not well understood as some users seemed to have limited understanding of the commands themselves. Several suggestions were made regarding ways in which to simplify navigation. Some users recommended that an "expert mode" option be offered that would allow users to minimize navigational steps and avoid graphics. Users also want the EXIT procedure simplified. They find it frustrating to not be able to exit in one step.

A problem which seemed relatively consistent among all users regardless of computer literacy is that of not being able to get back to their original place after LOOKing behind ads. This was very frustrating to the users. A few of the respondents were aware of ZIP; however, even they were frustrated because ZIP did not always return them to the original location.



- Speed

The speed of response remains the dominant issue with regard to the mechanics of the service. Users are dissatisfied and frustrated by the length of time required for the subject to be called up and for information to be painted on the screen. They attribute the slowness of the service to the presence of general graphics. Because the general graphics are perceived as an impediment to speed, most of the users are willing to forfeit general graphics for increased speed. They want to use the service because they are busy and want to save time, not because they have time "to kill." Also inextricably involved in the issue of speed is the issue of the depth of information provided. Users' perceptions of speed may change if they are provided with the depth of information they expect and desire. Currently they are disappointed with both the substantiveness of the information and the speed of receiving that information.

Related, in part, to the issue of speed is the desire on the part of users to be able to download information to a disk file and print it out. That way, they would have a hard copy of the desired data and also not have to wait in front of a screen for what they perceive to be long periods of time. Once again, however, it should be stressed that the depth of information would have to be sufficient to justify being printed.



## CONTENT

### • Depth

Users have mixed reactions to the content of the service. The majority find the breadth of the content to be a positive feature yet perceive the depth of the information to be a disappointing factor as it lacks substance.

Many users feel that other sources currently available to them (i.e. magazines, newspapers, television) are far more expedient sources of information than the service is in its present form. These sources are seen as more accessible due to fast and timely presentation of information and as more complete due to the level of depth of information provided. These users described the information provided on the service as being "superficial" and of "ankle depth."

### • Writing Style/Appearance

What might contribute to the perception of lack of depth are three factors - the presence of general graphics, the volume of text on each screen and the writing style of the presented material. Users find the general graphics bothersome and time-consuming and state they "don't want decorations around the news." Perhaps if news articles were formatted without graphics and, therefore, had more prose on each screen, they would be perceived as being more "substantial." In addition, users perceive the writing style as being "unsophisticated," "childish," and of a level below the presumed ability/intelligence of people who own and use personal computers. The style is also considered monotonous as the tone in the news segments remains constant. Users would like variation in the subject matter and in the perspective of news items such that newsworthy items on the "slice of life" scale are also available as well as heavy news. Users want a variation in tone to break the monotony.

### • Graphics

Users had mixed response to the graphics. As discussed in previous sections, many found the presence of general graphics in the informational areas of the service to be annoying. They perceive them as being unnecessary "fluff" which serves only to impede the speed of on-line response and occupy space which could be put to better use with prose.

Graphics in the form of product illustrations are perceived as valuable in the shopping area of the service. Users would like product illustrations to be even more detailed so that they would truly facilitate making a purchase decision through use of the service. The Polaroid and Audi ads were cited as having "well done" graphics -- the more detailed the product illustration, the better.



- Ads/Presentations

The leader ads were often considered distracting as well as misleading. Many comments were made regarding how these ads take up space and, if looked into, do not deliver the kind of information they promise. For example, one person was peeved by the Consumer Report ad which lures attention with "find out the latest" only to deliver information published in a year-old Consumer Report. Another user cited the Coldwell Banker ad as not fulfilling its promise. Rather than sending information to the user, it attempts to extract information about the user.

Respondents are well aware of the role that advertisers play in the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service and seem to accept that advertising is necessary to defray costs to service members; however, they want "honest" and "useful" advertising which "imparts knowledge" not advertising which contributes little to the purchase decision process. Included in the category of useful information are comparisons of product options and comparisons of prices.

The ads/presentations prompted many people to order catalogs but few to order an actual product. Many respondents found the information in the presentations to be inadequate for prompting a purchase decision. They want more concrete product information. Aside from their stated informational needs, users also want incentives to shop through the service. The incentives suggested by respondents were price-related in nature: discounts on products and special sale prices to PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> members only. This added element of exclusivity may truly enhance the attractiveness of the shopping service.

Users also had suggestions for improving the mechanics of the shopping service. These included a product index and an advertising index. With these enhancements and with content changes in the ad presentations, users would most likely perceive the shopping capability as truly shopping rather than as order entry.

- Variety of Content

Most respondents were enthusiastic about the variety of content offered by the service. They were very positive about the ability to access both informational and transactional areas. If familiar with other on-line services, respondents were particularly appreciative of the unique and varied features of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service. While variety is available, users want more in terms of both informational content and transactional capabilities. Suggestions for improving variety ranged from adding local information to broadening the shopping capability to offering more games to play. All suggestions appear in the section "Suggestions for Improvement from 6.0 Users." It should be appreciated that users perceive the service to be in its "infancy stage" and, therefore, have many suggestions for enhancing the usefulness of the service in terms of both its informational and transactional aspects.



## SERVICE USAGE

Initial exploration of the service tended to be random with choices of areas explored made according to topics of interest. After this exploration, most users established their own Personal PATH. Other respondents were systematic in their approach, going through each building floor to floor. Others stated they picked JUMP words from the "QUICKCHART" and utilized them to investigate what the service had to offer. Some of those who did set up their own Personal PATH commented that they were concerned that they would miss learning about new features on the service. To prevent this potential problem, a suggestion was made that as soon as users signed on to the service that they be forced to look at a screen which displayed new features added since their last usage.

The most frequently used areas of the service regardless of whether they were part of a Personal PATH or randomly explored were:

- News, Business News and Sports News
- Weather Map
- QUOTE TRACK
- Mailbox
- Experts
- Movie Tip/Movie Encyclopedia

Respondents felt that service usage in general would most likely vary according to season. For example, it was thought that the shopping capability would be more heavily used at Christmas, the suggested travel information and reservation capability more heavily used in the spring and summer months and usage overall would increase in the winter months when people have a tendency to stay at home more than during other times of the year.

Users found the utilitarian aspects of the service to be uniquely beneficial for shut-ins, people who reside in rural areas and retired people. The usefulness of the service for shut-ins is obvious; for those in rural areas, they would have access to both transactional and informational capabilities not readily available to them. Retired people were seen as appropriate users since the service as it presently exists is slow to deliver information and, therefore, might appeal to people who "have a lot of time on their hands."



## COMPARISON OF 6.0 VERSION WITH 5.X VERSION

The information presented in this section is a comparative analysis of the findings from previous qualitative research conducted with respondents who were exposed only to the 5.X version with December 1987 and February and March 1988 content and the findings from this most recent qualitative research among panel testers exposed only to the 6.0 version with the April content.

### • Expectations

Users of the 5.X version tended to question for whom the service was designed from a topical perspective. Due to the variety of topics of information available and due to the level of presentation, users could not identify a particular target market. They commented rather derogatorily that the service was attempting to be "everything to everybody" and also that it was "not sophisticated enough for the computer hack."

Users of the 5.X version had expectations of the service that were not met. They had anticipated that the speed of the service would be much faster than it was and that the depth of the information provided would be much more substantial.

Just as the users of the 5.X version questioned who the target market of the service was so too did the 6.0 version users, only their uncertainty seemed to arise from a utilitarian perspective rather than a topical one. Their thoughts were more centered on what group of people would most likely use the service, and their conclusion was people with lots of time - a conclusion quite opposite to their original expectation. Just as the 5.X users had, the 6.0 users had anticipated that the service would provide more substantive information and at a faster speed than it did. The 6.0 users also stated that they expected more variety of informational and transactional capabilities, creating a service which would truly be a useful tool for accomplishing the daily tasks of life.



- Changes in Perception/Use of Service

- \* 5.X testers voiced problems with the mechanics of the cursor. They were bothered by the irregular cursor pattern and complained that visibility of the cursor was very poor on a monochrome screen. Many users also took issue with the fact that the cursor automatically defaulted to LOOK, finding this presumptuous. Among 6.0 users, only visibility of the cursor on a monochrome screen remained a problem.
- \* 5.X users had more complaints about and problems with installation than did 6.0 users. These complaints came from testers who were loading the service onto hard disks. Few 6.0 users had such problems with installation onto hard disks.
- \* 5.X users complained about the "laborious" methods of navigating through the service. Many were unaware of the function keys and, therefore, relied solely on the command bar to maneuver through the service. In contrast, 6.0 users seemed less disturbed by the navigation process as they used the function keys more frequently. The 6.0 users were more informed about the function keys having had information made available to them through the "QUICKCHART."
- \* With regard to content of the service, 5.X users stated they wanted to be alerted as to who the source of information was on news and sports stories. 6.0 users, on the other hand, wanted the date of the story.
- \* An area of content which received a fair amount of criticism by the 5.X users was the stock information. They felt the information was incomplete and often not timely. In contrast, 6.0 users appeared satisfied with both the timeliness and amount of stock information provided.
- \* 5.X users wanted a database of old/new movies to refer to for rating information and other statistics. The 6.0 users liked the video library but felt it was lacking because it did not include current movies.
- \* In the focus groups with 5.0 users it appeared that the respondents were the only service users in the household. On rare occasion, a child or a spouse would use the service. Among 6.0 users, this did not appear to be the case. Many respondents stated that their household members (both children and adults) shared in the usage of the service.



- Problems and Desires Which Remain Constant From the 5.X to the 6.0 Version

Problems:

- \* Lack of depth
- \* Grade level reading style
- \* Lack of speed
- \* "Call Waiting" disconnects
- \* Cluttered screens/uneconomical use of screen space
- \* Unaware of how to return to original screen from LOOK
- \* Cannot always go BACK

Desires:

- \* Banking capabilities
- \* Grocery Shopping
- \* Airline travel, entertainment reservations and ticketing
- \* Local information
- \* Increased number of stores
- \* Product index
- \* Shopping incentives
- \* Sophisticated user network - special interest groups, etc.
- \* Enhanced product illustrations
- \* Ability to download information and print
- \* Option to "suppress" or "disable" graphics

- What People Still Need to Optimally Use Service

6.0 users still had problems with actually using the service to its optimal capability. The problems seemed to arise from the users not being provided with the necessary information about particular mechanics of the service. The following remain informational needs:

- \* Concise glossary of commands/navigational options
- \* Better promotion/explanation of the use of the function keys. (This could perhaps be incorporated into the command bar by inserting the corresponding function key number into the appropriate command box.)
- \* More information about auxiliary commands (i.e. ZIP, TOOLS, etc.)
- \* Instructions regarding member lists
- \* Instructions regarding "Call Waiting"



### SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT FROM 6.0 USERS

6.0 users had several suggestions they felt would enhance the service and make it an attractive tool for home use. Suggestions involved adjustments to the mechanical, informational and transactional areas of the service:

- Decrease general graphics to yield increased speed and volume of prose
- Provide greater depth overall
- Increase promotion of "new" areas on service
  - \* Force users to see new areas since last log-on by having screen automatically come up after sign-on
- Increase transactional capabilities
  - \* Airline/travel reservations
  - \* Local and national entertainment/sports tickets
  - \* Banking
  - \* Retail stores
  - \* Florist services
  - \* Grocery shopping
  - \* Gourmet "take-out" delivery service
- Increase interactive capabilities
  - \* Games
  - \* Special interest groups
- Improve print/download capability
- Sort membership list by geographic region
- Provide easier access to topical information
  - \* Subject index
  - \* Product index
  - \* Advertising index
- Provide incentive to use shopping services



- Topical improvements/additions:

- \* International news
- \* Local information
- \* Menu planner/recipe retrieval
- \* More features for children
- \* Library of book reviews, current movie reviews
- \* On-line encyclopedia



## CONCLUSIONS

- Speed remains a raw issue. Speed continues to be a major disappointment for users and an instrumental factor in users' altered perceptions of the service. Because the service is much slower than anticipated, users interpret the service as not being appropriate for busy, active people but rather conducive for use by people who have "lots of time on their hands."
- Users continue to perceive the depth of information offered on the service to be superficial and inadequate. Because of its lack of depth, the service is not even considered as an alternative to currently available sources of information - TV, newspaper, radio. If it offered more substantive information, the service may have increased value over traditional information sources.
- The enhanced content of the 6.0 version seems to be attracting broader usage of the service among families. More children and spouses seemed to get involved in using the service than did the family members of respondents who were on-line with the 5.X version. Other household members' interest seemed to expand usage of various areas as well as increase time of usage.
- Attitudes toward the future and the potential of the PRODIGY<sup>SM</sup> service seem far more promising and optimistic than during previous research. The service is considered to have unlimited potential if the speed and the depth issues are appropriately addressed.

